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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000826

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR VISITS KOGI STATE

REF: 08 ABUJA 0686

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On April 30, Ambassador (accompanied by Poloff as notetaker) traveled to Kogi State where she paid a courtesy call on Governor Ibrahim Idris (Peoples Democratic Party - PDP) in Lokoja. Ambassador inquired about press reports alleging youth had stormed the government house in Lokoja on April 28; Idris said that while the situation was handled poorly, it had been resolved peacefully. The Ambassador then turned the conversation to agriculture, informing Idris of an upcoming workshop in Lagos that would benefit agribusiness in Kogi. Idris lamented that large scale agriculture had not progressed much in the area, but shared his goal of making his state Nigeria's largest exporter of palm oil, rice, sugar, and sesame seed, all of which were widely cultivated there. On politics, Idris maintained that things were "getting better." He cited the recent PDP convention's decision to amend the party constitution, reducing the power of Board of Trustees (BOT) Chairman Obasanjo, as evidence of the country moving in a more democratic direction. In the area of health care, Idris highlighted the completion of a new hospital in the state capital with medical equipment purchased from the U.S., and claimed Americans were scheduled to come to the hospital to provide free health care. Following their private conversation, the Ambassador and Governor gave brief remarks to the press. Idris again urged foreign investment in "mechanized agriculture and commercial farming." The Ambassador highlighted the fifteen U.S. programs currently in Kogi State which deal with both agriculture and health. Ambassador also paid courtesy calls on the Olujumu (traditional ruler) of Ijumu Kingdom, Oba Dr. Jerome Sumanu, in Iyara; and the Ologidi (traditional ruler) of Ogidi Kingdom, Oba Rabu Oladimeji Sule, in Ogidi, and visited the women weavers' cooperative at the Nike Cultural Center. End Summary.

KOGI STATE GOVERNOR IDRIS

¶2. (C) On April 30, Ambassador, accompanied by Poloff (notetaker) traveled to Kogi State and paid a courtesy call on Governor Ibrahim Idris (PDP) at his office in Lokoja. Idris welcomed Ambassador into his office for a private discussion before appearing before the local media.

Ambassador queried Idris about press reports that over 100 youths had stormed government house on April 28 and assaulted a security officer. Idris lamented that the security officers there had handled the situation poorly, indicating that they did not touch base with him first, as they should have, when the youths arrived. Instead, The security simply refused the youths' request for an audience with the governor, prompting them to force their way in. Idris confirmed press reports that the youths were angry because one of their friends was in a local hospital and not receiving care. Idris said that once he learned of the situation, he spoke to the youths and agreed to take care of the patient, including paying his hospital bills; after that youth left quietly.

13. (C) The Ambassador then turned to agricultural development issues, informing the governor about an upcoming program in Lagos geared toward agriprocessors and exporters. Ambassador suggested the governor submit approximately ten names of possible attendees to her office, and she would ensure official invitations were extended. Idris expressed his gratitude and promised to send names of qualified people. He added that although there were not currently a large number of exporters in the state, his goal was to make Kogi the largest exporter in Nigeria of palm oil, rice, sugar, and sesame seed, as those were the major crops in the area. Idris commented that some day the oil in Nigeria would be gone, and the people would be forced to turn their focus back to the land and other natural resources. According to Idris, the Chinese were currently building training schools in Kogi that offered training on small machinery; but there had not

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been much progress on large scale agriculture. Ambassador presented Idris with a copy of a recent feasibility study conducted by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency that highlighted three areas within Nigeria that offered substantive coal resources and the best chance for success on the development of coal briquettes, one of which was Kogi State. Ambassador added that similar studies on other resources such as ethanol and cassava would be available at the aforementioned agriculture program in Lagos in June.

14. (C) Moving on to politics, Ambassador asked Idris for his opinion on the recent PDP convention. Idris suggested that the vote by the delegates to amend the party constitution (and limit the power of Board of Trustees Chairman, and former President, Obasanjo) was a demonstration that things were "getting better," and that the country was moving in a more democratic direction. Idris added that Nigeria was "copying from America," but noted that America had been around a long time and Nigeria was still just beginning. He thought the fact that Nigeria had witnessed two consecutive civilian Presidents (referring to the democratic transition from former President Obasanjo to current President Yar'Adua) was a good start; he hoped things would continued to change. He stipulated that government leaders needed to "be very serious" about change, if others were to follow. He said that "although people may not like (change), it is for the best." Continuing with the theme of change, Ambassador inquired about electoral reform and whether it would be successful. Idris replied that there will always be "people with selfish interests," but that Nigeria will do its best to advocate for reform.

15. (C) Idris recalled their previous meeting (when he came to Embassy Abuja for a visa in December 2008 and paid a courtesy call on the Ambassador). During that meeting, Idris had informed the Ambassador that his impending trip to the U.S. was to acquire medical equipment for a new hospital. According to Idris, four out of ten containers of equipment purchased on that trip had since arrived and been installed at the new "Lokoja Specialists Hospital," the first hospital in the state capital. Idris also mentioned that there were "Americans coming to provide free treatment" at the hospital, but could not provide more specifics as the details were

being handled by the Commissioner for Health. Ambassador applauded Idris for his efforts to improve health services in the state, and provided him with a list of the current U.S. programs in Kogi State that also address health issues.

16. (C) Following their private discussion, the Ambassador and Governor gave brief remarks to a gathering of the State Executive Council, various state government officials, and the press. The Ambassador highlighted the 15 current U.S. programs in the areas of health care and agriculture in the state, and said the U.S. looked forward to continued partnership. Ambassador also noted that she would be paying courtesy calls on two traditional leaders as well as visiting the Nike Cultural Center, underscoring the importance of experiencing the culture of the people of Kogi State. Governor Idris acknowledged U.S. support and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to build on the current relationship. Idris requested additional assistance in the area of malaria prevention and suggested that the U.S. partner with Kogi on "mechanized agriculture and commercial farming." Idris argued that Kogi State offered one of the best opportunities for U.S. investment for several reasons: it was "blessed with good climate and vast crops," it offered government incentives on land, had invested in road infrastructure, and had just secured accreditation for all 29 programs being offered at Kogi University. He added that 29 of the 37 minerals found in Nigeria could be harvested in Kogi. Idris thanked Ambassador for visiting Kogi State and said he looked forward to continued friendship and partnership.

IJUMU KINGDOM

17. (U) Later the same day, Ambassador traveled approximately two hours north of Lokoja to Iyara, the headquarters of the

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Ijumu Local Government Area (LGA) to pay a courtesy call on the Olujumu (traditional ruler) of the Ijumu Kingdom, Oba Dr. Jerome Sumanu. Ambassador was greeted by a gathering of local Royal Fathers, LGA Councillors, and the Chairman of the Ijumu LGA Council, Dr. Deacon J.A. Owotogbe. The Olujumu welcomed the Ambassador, noting that she was the first international dignitary to visit the newly completed LGA headquarters building. The Olujumu expressed gratitude for the visit and urged a strengthening of the relationship between the U.S. and Nigeria in the form of cultural exchanges, visits, and art exhibitions, noting the number of great artisans present in Kogi State. LGA Chairman Owotogbe also thanked the Ambassador for taking the time to pay a courtesy call and took the opportunity to highlight that Ijumu was rich in both culture and agriculture. Drawing attention to the large quantities of cocoa, coffee, cashew, palm oil, cassava, and other assets in Ijumu, Owotogbe urged U.S. investment in large scale farming. He added that there were a number of untapped mineral resources available such as marble, feldspar, and talc that would warrant investment in mineral exploration by foreign companies.

OGIDI KINGDOM AND NIKE ART GALLERY

18. (U) Following her visit to the Ijumu Kingdom, Ambassador traveled to the Ogidi LGA where she met with the Ologidi (traditional ruler) of the Ogidi Kingdom, Oba Rabu Oladimeji Sule and visited the Nike Cultural Center. In his welcome remarks, Sule noted that the Ambassador was his first official visitor, as he had just been crowned Ologidi the previous week. Ambassador noted that she had met Princess Nike Okundaye, founder of the Nike Cultural Center, many years ago while in Nigeria, and had promised one day to visit her home of Ogidi. Ambassador highlighted her interest in experiencing the culture of the Ogidi people, and her desire to foster better understanding and partnership between them and America. Once the welcome ceremony was complete, the Ambassador took a tour of the Nike Cultural Center where she was able to observe women weavers, bead makers, cultural

dances, and the art known as "Adire," or hand painting of fabrics. Before departing the Ambassador distributed over 100 backpacks and books to a group of primary schools students who had come to welcome her to Ogidi.

GOOD THINGS IN KOGI

¶9. (C) Comment: Although Governor Idris' 2007 election was annulled and his subsequent March 2008 re-election allegedly flawed (ref A), he seems interested in making improvements to his state. His interest in agribusiness is promising and post will follow up with the governor to ensure the appropriate people are invited to the agribusiness program scheduled to take place in Lagos in June. While we did not visit the new hospital, it is encouraging to hear that such a project was undertaken and completed. The women weavers of Ogidi are extremely talented and a would be a great avenue to explore for future cultural exchanges. End Comment.

¶10. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS